

NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUND NO. 5-6009
PAUL FRANCUCH/DETROIT

JULY 18, 1978

REPUBLICAN URBAN STRATEGY

ANNCR:

MEMBERS OF THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON WEDNESDAY (JULY 18) BEGIN A THREE-DAY MEETING IN DETROIT TO DISCUSS WAYS OF ATTRACTING MORE URBAN VOTERS TO THEIR PARTY. THEIR EFFORTS WILL FOCUS PARTICULARLY ON BLACKS, AS PAUL FRANCUCH EXPLAINS IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM DETROIT.

VOICE:

THE REPUBLICANS HAVE NICK-NAMED THIS MEETING THEIR "RENAISSANCE CONFERENCE," PARTIALLY FOR SYMBOLIC REASONS AND PARTIALLY AS AN EXPRESSION OF OPTIMISM. FOR NEARLY A DECADE, DETROIT HAS BEEN A SYMBOL OF URBAN DECAY IN THE UNITED STATES, BUT THAT HAS CHANGED IN RECENT YEARS. THE MOST GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATION OF THAT CHANGE IS DETROIT'S NEW "RENAISSANCE CENTER" -- A LAVISH CLUSTER OF MIRRORED-GLASS SKYSCRAPPERS BUILT WITH PRIVATE FUNDS AS A SYMBOL OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY'S FAITH IN THE CITY. THE REPUBLICANS -- WHOSE POPULARITY HAS SUNK TO THE LOWEST POINT IN DECADES -- CHOSE THE RENAISSANCE CENTER FOR THEIR MEETING.

THIS NOVEMBER, EVERY SEAT IN THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND IN ONE-THIRD OF THE SENATE IS UP FOR ELECTION. PRESENTLY, THE DEMOCRATS HOLD AN ENORMOUS TWO-TO-ONE MAJORITY OVER THE REPUBLICANS IN THE HOUSE, AND A SOLID MAJORITY IN THE SENATE. THE MOST RECENT GALLOP POLL SHOWS THAT IF ELECTIONS WERE HELD TODAY, THE DEMOCRATS WOULD RETAIN THEIR POWER. AND ON THE INDIVIDUAL STATE LEVEL, REPUBLICANS CONTROL ONLY A HANDFUL OF THE GOVERNORSHIPS AND LEGISLATURES. AS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, PROSPECTS FOR GAINS ARE DISCOURAGING.

WITH THAT AS A BACKDROP, REPUBLICANS HAVE COME TO DETROIT TO TRY TO REVIVE THEIR PARTY. MOST OF THOSE IN ATTENDANCE ARE SO-CALLED "GRASS ROOTS" ORGANIZERS -- PEOPLE WHO PROMOTE CANDIDATES LOCALLY BY CANVASSING VOTERS, DISTRIBUTING PARTY LITERATURE, AND GETTING PEOPLE TO THE VOTING BOOTHS ON ELECTION DAY. THEY WANT TO LEARN FROM CONFERENCE LEADERS NOW THEY CAN DO THEIR JOBS BETTER, ESPECIALLY IN THE BIG CITIES -- PLACES WHERE REPUBLICANS HAVE TRADITIONALLY BEEN WEAK.

FOR ALMOST A YEAR NOW, THE REPUBLICANS HAVE BEEN TRYING IN VARIOUS WAYS TO ATTRACT MORE BLACKS TO THEIR PARTY. IN MANY AMERICAN CITIES, ESPECIALLY IN THE NORTH, BLACKS REPRESENT EITHER A SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT, OR THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION. SINCE THE DAYS OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION, BLACKS HAVE VOTED OVERWHELMINGLY DEMOCRATIC, BUT THEIR HAVE BEEN SIGNS RECENTLY THAT THEIR STRONG ALLEGIANCE IS WAVERING. EVEN A MINOR SHIFT AMONG BLACKS TO THE REPUBLICAN PARTY COULD HAVE PROFOUND CONSEQUENCES.

BLACK SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENT CARTER IS REPORTEDLY WANING, AND THE REPUBLICANS PLAN TO COMBINE THIS CHANGE IN POLITICAL FORTUNES WITH PROPOSALS FOR NEW LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO HELP BLACKS, CHICANOS AND OTHER INNER-CITY RESIDENTS AS THEIR FORMULA FOR LURING NEW PARTY SUPPORT. THE PARTY HAS EVEN HIRED A BLACK POLITICAL CONSULTING FIRM TO ADVISF REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES HOW TO COURT BLACK VOTERS. SOME OF THEIR STRATEGIES WILL BE PASSED ON TO PARTY WORKERS NOW MEETING IN DETROIT.

IF THE WORKERS LEARN THEIR LESSONS, AND PARTY LEADERS DEVISE APPEALING PROGRAMS FOR CREATING JOBS AND CURBING URBAN BLIGHT, THE PAYOFF COULD BE SUBSTANTIAL COME THE ELECTIONS THIS NOVEMBER.